

THE PROS AND CONS OF THE BOMBING
OF NORTH VIETNAM

I. Positive Effects of Bombing

A. Manpower Drain*

1. The airstrikes have tied up from 600,000 to 700,000 North Vietnamese people. The major categories are:

a. About 220,000 full-time and 100,000 to 200,000 part-time workers have been diverted to repair, reconstruction, dispersal, and transport programs.

b. About 150,000 persons are involved in part-time civil defense activities.

c. About 83,000 military personnel, or 20 percent of North Vietnam's military strength, are directly engaged in air defense activities; an additional 27,500 personnel are indirectly involved.

d. An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 personnel are directly involved in full-time coastal defense duties.

2. These diversions of manpower have limited North Vietnam's capability for sustained large-scale conventional military operations against South Vietnam.

3. The manpower shortage has also contributed substantially to a shortfall of from 5 to 10 percent in agricultural production and caused sharp increases in North Vietnam's food import requirements.

4. The North Vietnamese population has sustained from 36,000 to 38,000 casualties, of whom about 12,000 were military

* Latest estimates and, therefore, higher than Secretary McNamara's 1 March press release.

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personnel. Most of the civilian casualties (at least two-thirds) are of a war-related nature -- for example, workers engaged in the repair of bomb damage, and truck drivers on logistic supply lines.

B. Military Effects

1. Air attacks have destroyed or inactivated significant percentages of total national capacity in direct military or war-supporting target categories. These include:

<u>Target Category</u>	<u>Percent of National Capacity Destroyed</u>
Barracks	23
Ammunition depots	69
Petroleum storage	55
Electric power	30 to 45
Explosives manufacturing	71
Radar sites	43

2. Additional significant destruction of airfields, naval bases, SAM sites, bridges, and communication facilities has taken place.

3. North Vietnamese prisoners tell us the bombing of North Vietnam and the Laotian Panhandle makes the infiltration of South Vietnam very difficult. A graphic picture of what infiltrators go through because of airstrikes is portrayed in the captured diary of a North Vietnamese soldier, [] who marched south last year. During a six-week trip down the Ho Chi Minh trail, Corporal Tap's unit was struck twice by American aircraft, and raids hit nearby on four other occasions. His unit usually had to travel at night without lights. As a result, men stumbled and fell, and often had to eat uncooked food. Once he broke regulations and lit a fire; just as he did so a reconnaissance plane zoomed overhead at treetop level, and it "made his hair stand on end." When his unit arrived in South Vietnam, it had suffered several casualties; many others had deserted. Many of the survivors had malaria; all were exhausted. We do not know how many infiltrators are lost on the march south, but we do know that stories and attitudes such as those expressed above are not unusual. While bombing is not the complete

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answer to infiltration, it complicates the journey southward and reduces the morale and immediate combat effectiveness of those who make the arduous trip.

C. Political Effect

The bombing initially hardened popular attitudes in North Vietnam, enabling Hanoi to arouse and manipulate the nationalist sentiments of its people. But Hanoi's effort to persuade the United States to halt the bombing may now reflect the reduction of popular enthusiasm for its policies resulting from cumulative war-weariness of the populace. In addition, the shock created by our disregard of the "privileged sanctuary" for indirect aggression which North Vietnam represented evidently has increased factional debates in the Hanoi regime between advocates of aggression and those responsible for developing the north's economy and implementing its policy of "socialist revolution." This factional split parallels and reinforces the lines drawn between those favoring Peking's hard line, liberation war strategy, and those sympathizing with the USSR's concern over continued escalation. The growing cost of the war to the Soviet Union and the Eastern European Communist countries has reinforced their preference for negotiations in opposition to Hanoi's policy of continuing the war, which is enthusiastically supported only by Communist China.

D. Effect of Abandonment of Bombing on Hanoi

Hanoi would regard the abandonment of bombing its territory as a clear-cut major victory. It would believe that, by propaganda and political pressure, it had forced the United States to take this action. Hanoi's belief in ultimate victory would be strengthened; it would be greatly encouraged that the United States would ultimately tire of the war. Almost certainly, the North Vietnamese would not interpret a halt to the bombing as an act of US de-escalation, but as a sign that its policy was forcing the United States to retreat.

E. Economic Effects

1. The cost of repairing the damage caused by air attacks exceeds \$215 million, of which over \$80 million represents destruction of military equipment and supplies. Economic losses include not only repair costs of direct physical damage to transportation

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equipment, bridges, and electric power plants but also heavy indirect losses stemming from the reduction of agricultural output, the impairment of foreign exchange earnings resulting from the inability to continue normal exports, and the expense of passive defense measures.

2. Estimated losses in agricultural production and the fishing industry total over \$30 million. Although the food situation is not yet critical, rice production was 300,000 tons below average in 1966; this deficit will create additional problems for the regime and will require more food imports from other Communist countries. North Vietnam has been forced to cut back on some of its exports of processed food.

3. Export losses attributable to the bombing total over \$15 million, an amount equivalent to about one-third of North Vietnam's usual annual export earnings of hard currencies.

4. The cost of the more than 20,000 units of transport equipment destroyed or damaged by air attacks is between \$35 million and \$40 million. The major losses of transport equipment are as follows:

<u>Equipment</u>	<u>Units</u>	
	<u>Destroyed</u>	<u>Damaged</u>
Vessels	4,451	8,233
Vehicles	2,548	2,377
Railroad stock	1,508	1,859

5. The air attacks have inflicted high costs in the maintaining of supplies for the Communist forces in Laos and South Vietnam. North Vietnam has had to increase the number of transport workers by 50,000 and to commit one-fourth of its truck inventory in the effort to maintain distribution and logistic activities at required levels. It is estimated that at least 3,000 truck drivers alone have been lost as a result of air attacks. The inability to move goods in daytime has reduced the operating efficiency of its

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truck park by at least 50 percent and has at least doubled, if not tripled, the time required to transport goods. We estimate that losses in transit resulting from spoilage, pilferage, and air attack have reduced total traffic volume by 20 to 40 percent.

6. The air attacks have forced North Vietnam to undertake a program to disperse industry, which has disrupted normal economic production and aggravated the management and administration of economic activity.

7. The disruption caused by air interdiction of the transport system and electric power facilities, plus the dislocation of manpower, has required the indefinite postponement of Ho Chi Minh's plan to build North Vietnam into a modern industrial state. As the war continues, the industrial damage mounts, and the time when North Vietnam can hope to have a modern industrial sector is pushed progressively farther into the future. If Hanoi fails to react, a continuation of the air attacks will deal a most serious blow to North Vietnamese hopes for economic progress and status, nullifying a decade of intense effort and sacrifice on the part of the people.

F. Effects on South Vietnamese Morale

The bombing has given a real boost to the morale and determination of our South Vietnamese allies. The situation existing prior to the initiation of the aerial pressure campaign against North Vietnam was one the South Vietnamese found increasingly frustrating, discouraging, and intolerable. South Vietnam was racked by a war instigated, supported and controlled by Hanoi. The destruction and unrest caused by this war, however, was confined to South Vietnam. North Vietnam got off scot free. Its territory was immune to attack and it suffered no physical punishment despite the fact that it was waging war south of the 17th Parallel. This situation continued even after North Vietnam began taking a direct hand in the southern conflict. Ethnic North Vietnamese soldiers began appearing in South Vietnam in mid-1964; by the end of 1964 a whole division of the North Vietnamese Army (the 325th) was moving into South Vietnam. The policy decision to use the North Vietnamese Army in an attempt to crush the Saigon Government had obviously been made in Hanoi by 1964 and was in the process of implementation well before the start of our bombing.

Cessation of the bombing would be something the South Vietnamese would understandably find depressing and perplexing. They, who are bearing and will continue to bear the major burden of this war so long as Hanoi's aggression continues, would find it hard to comprehend why the aggressor should be relieved of his burden and no longer compelled to pay some price on his own territory for the hardship and destruction he is inflicting on his southern neighbors.

II. The Negative Effects of the Bombing

A. Costs of Operation

The air campaign against North Vietnam is expensive. Direct operating costs, which do not include the maintenance of air bases and the aircraft carriers or logistic support, have been:

	<u>Million US \$</u>	
	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>
Aircraft lost	305.8	605.6
Sortie overhead	98.0	330.4
Ordnance	56.2	311.5
Total	<u>460.0</u>	<u>1,247.5</u>

B. Offsetting Effects of Communist Aid

North Vietnam's apparent willingness to withstand the effects of continued air attack may be explained by the assistance furnished by other Communist countries. Total economic and military aid delivered in 1966 amounted to more than \$500 million, or almost four times the damage resulting from air attack in 1966. There is at least a tacit implication that the USSR and Communist China have committed themselves to underwrite the eventual reconstruction of North Vietnam's industrial base.

C. Innocent Civilian Casualties

While the air attacks have been directed solely at military and war supporting targets, it is true that there have been, unfortunately,

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some innocent civilian casualties. Careful planning by US force commanders has held this total down to what must be recognized by any historical comparison as a very small number. Nevertheless, Hanoi, its Communist sympathizers around the world, and many well-meaning people in other countries have had a propaganda field day with the handful of authentic cases of innocent civilian casualties. This has hurt the image of the United States despite the good military record.

D. Adverse Third-Country Attitudes

While there is considerable third-country support for the bombing of North Vietnam, there is strong opposition to these air attacks in certain neutral countries. This opposition seems to stem from fear that the war may become a worldwide conflict, or that the United States is guilty of "aggression" against a weaker Asiatic state. Specific major nations in opposition include India and France; important segments of public opinion in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Japan share the opposition view.

E. Air Campaign a "Failure"

Finally, the air campaign is frequently criticized because it hasn't stopped the infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam. But as Secretary McNamara has made clear, the United States never believed that it would. Air attack against military targets in the north was designed to make Hanoi pay a high price for continuing its infiltration, and it has done this.

F. The Bombing Is Prolonging the War, It Is Charged

The argument that the bombing of the north is prolonging the war or keeping Hanoi from the negotiating table overlooks the nature of Hanoi's aggression and the North Vietnamese rationale concerning the war in Vietnam. Although Hanoi has openly acknowledged since 1960 the role of North Vietnam as the rear base for the "revolution" in the south, it has supported that "revolution" through clandestine means to maintain the myth that the conflict in the south is an internal one.

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North Vietnam, therefore, officially views the cessation of the bombing as a means of restoring the war to its pre-bombing status and removing the north as an overt participant. The problem is thus not one of convincing Hanoi of our peaceful intent nor of our making a gesture of good will in order to negotiate with Hanoi. The bombing is not preventing Hanoi from halting its material support for the so-called "war of liberation" in the south, and cessation of the bombing would not in itself cause Hanoi to halt its unacknowledged aggression.